

*Colocasia esculenta*

[Synonyms : *Alocasia dussii*, *Alocasia illustris*, *Arum chinense*, *Arum colocasia*, *Arum colocasioides*, *Arum esculentum*, *Arum nymphaeifolium*, *Arum peltatum*, *Caladium acre*, *Caladium colocasia*, *Caladium esculentum*, *Caladium nymphaeaeifolium*, *Caladium violaceum*, *Calla gaby*, *Colocasia acris*, *Colocasia antiquorum*, *Colocasia antiquorum* var. *aquatilis*, *Colocasia antiquorum* var. *esculenta*, *Colocasia antiquorum* var. *euchlora*, *Colocasia antiquorum* var. *fontanesii*, *Colocasia antiquorum* var. *globulifera*, *Colocasia antiquorum* var. *illustris*, *Colocasia antiquorum* var. *nymphaeifolia*, *Colocasia antiquorum* var. *typica*, *Colocasia colocasia*, *Colocasia esculenta* var. *acris*, *Colocasia esculenta* var. *antiquorum*, *Colocasia esculenta* var. *aquatilis*, *Colocasia esculenta* var. *euchlora*, *Colocasia esculenta* var. *fontanesii*, *Colocasia esculenta* var. *globulifera*, *Colocasia esculenta* var. *illustris*, *Colocasia esculenta* var. *typica*, *Colocasia euchlora*, *Colocasia fontanesii*, *Colocasia himalensis*, *Colocasia nymphaeifolia*, *Colocasia peregrina*, *Colocasia vulgaris*]

**TARO** (Danish, English, Esperanto, French, German, Maori, Swedish) is a deciduous aquatic perennial. Native to tropical Asia it has a large petal-like, yellow to orange leaf (spathe) sometimes shielding an oval spike (spadix) of minute flowers.

It is also known as *Arvi* (Hindi), Black caladium, *Chamadumpa* (Telugu), Chinese eddoe, *Chou de Chine* (West Indian), Cocoyam, Colalu (tropical American and Pacific Islands), *Dachine* (West Indian), *Daesi-ala* (Sri Lankan), *Dalo* (Fijian), Dasheen (West Indian), Eatable arum, *Eddoe* (West Indian), Elephant's ear, *Gabi* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Gahala* (Sri Lankan), *Gelo* (Javanese), *Ghorghas* (Maltese), *Grand arum* (French), *Ignamme* (French), Imperial taro, *Inhame* (Portuguese), *Kachalu* (Hindi), *Kachchi* (Indian), *Kachu* (Bengali, Hindi, Sanskrit), *Kand-ala* (Sri Lankan), *Keladi* (Malay), *Kiri-ala* (Sri Lankan), *Kolokass* (Arabic), *Kolokazio manĝebla* (Esperanto), *Kooko* (Twi), *Kulqas* (Arabic), *Madère* (West Indian), *Melanga* (Cuban), *Nduuma* (Kikuyu), Old cocoyam, Purpleleaf taro, *Qulqas* (Arabic), Scratch coco, *Seppan-kizhangu* (Tamil), *Sevel-ala* (Sri Lankan), *Shana-dumpa* (Tamil), *Shembu* (Malayalam), *Taaro* (Finnish), *Taleus* (Sundanese), *Ta'o* (Hawaiian), *Talo* (Samoan, Tongan), Taro root, West Indian kale, *Wu tau* (Chinese), Yam, and *Yamswurzel* (German).

Generally flowers are rare.

Warning – taro has some potentially poisonous qualities (which are usually destroyed by boiling).

*Esculenta* is Latin (eatable).

Many authorities believe that taro could have been among the first plants to be cultivated in south-eastern Asia (as early as 6000 BC) in the initial attempts at formal agricultural practices, and it is believed to have reached Egypt by the early centuries AD. From Egypt it spread through the Mediterranean to Italy and Spain. It also spread through the African Continent, probably in a pincer movement from Zanzibar in the east and the Mediterranean in the north. Taro was one of the plants that the Polynesians took with them to Hawaii on the eastern side of the Pacific Ocean in about 750 AD. Its introduction to North America however appears to attract debate as some authorities suggest that it was introduced to the United States by African slaves and others ponder the possibility

that it was taken there by the Spanish and Italian explorers. In either event taro has never been able to compete successfully with other crops on the North American Continent. Locally the young leaves and stalks are blanched and eaten as spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*), and the starchy corms are stewed, boiled or fried. The tuberous stem bases of some varieties, particularly those known locally as Dasheen, Eddoe and *Kanda-ala*, are prepared as an easily digestible soup or baby food and are said to be relished as a delicacy by invalids. The corms and stems were part of the New Zealand Maori's diet. Today the corms are still cultivated in the United States and are particularly popular in the West Indies (where the young leaves, thoroughly cooked, are also enjoyed) and Hawaii. In Hawaii and Polynesia taro is the main ingredient of a traditional dish, *poi*. Island natives used to consume 10-20 lb. each, daily. Today at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> Centuries it is still enjoyed but is usually prepared commercially. In Malaya however, certainly in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, it was being cultivated there primarily as pig food. In parts of south-eastern Asia they still dye cloth black by burying it in the mud under the growing taro. The waxy-surfaced leaves have also been used in parts of south-eastern Asia as covers on jars and wrapping for food. Medicinally, juice from the corms has been used to treat scorpion stings – and baldness. In Hawaii the flesh was once an ingredient in a local laxative.